

Postscript by Jack Post

A month ago the boats all lurked in the gloom of the storage shed, swathed in canvas covers or yellowed, dusty plastic, vague ghosts in the shadows, topheavy on their cradles, lifeless and dull. Swallows darted back and forth through the broken windows of the clerestory, disturbed at the streak of sunlight angled across the beams when we rolled back the tall doors. Locating our hull well back in the stacked rows, we hurried back out of the chill dampness into the fresh spring morning. Summer, and the smell of the open sea, seemed far away.

Last week the shed stood empty of its winter tenants, massed now in neat ranks in the yard at the water's edge. There the long arm of a crane upended spars from the wharf, then lowered them onto the chocks set in the decks, while boys swiftly secured the shrouds, first fore and aft, then along the port and starboard rails, then adjusted the turnbuckles to an even strain. With the rigging in place, a monstrous gantry crane rolled up, straddled the boat like a colossus, lifted it on heavy slings out of its cradle, and conveyed it majestically across the yard and out over the water on a pair of separated concrete piers. Then slowly cable from the drums lowered the precious cargo down and down, until the tide crept up to the freshly-painted water line, and the boat floated at last in its own element.

Perhaps 20 boats still waited above in various stages of readiness, ours among them. Along the floats below, another eight or ten were rafted, with owners and yard men swarming over them in apparent complete confusion, loaded with gear and tackle and all the intricate necessities of life on the water.

During the afternoon, one boat or another would get its last fitting for the mast or boom, the motor would cough into action, lines would be uncleated from the neighbors jammed on each side, and with a happy owner at the helm, would move out into deep water. The shipfitters and the mechanics would stretch their muscles, then move over to the next boat in line; while up in the yard, the great gantry would roll ponderously over to the next candidate for launching. Carefully set slings would tighten under the keel, lift the boat free of its cradle, and again the monster would head out onto the high tracks over the water.

Our turn did not come that day, nor the next, nor the next. Not until ten days after the May 15 date promised for launching was the mast stepped, and not until another 48 hours after that was our craft afloat. Then began the trek from the car down the steep gangway to the float with load after load of blankets and cookware and tide tables and charts and foul weather gear and tools, and, yes, the galley stove. Canned goods and cold drinks could wait, but necessities like life preservers, the compass, and the parallel rule must be aboard. Where was our dinghy? The man who knew had gone home; so we headed out into the bay without it. When we got to Snug Harbor someone would ferry us ashore.

Leaving the lee of Plymouth, a brisk westerly drove us down the channel, past buoys dragged under by the racing tide. With the late afternoon sun warm on our backs, we swept by Clark's Island, zigzagged to port, starboard, port, then back one more (the Lord help those who don't know this channel), and finally straightened away for the run into the basin. At one, the Yacht Club had opened the new season with an official flag raising, a presentation of the new members, and a late lunch when the victuals failed to show up on time; but for us the season opened when we rounded up to our mooring--or it almost did. Someone else was lying comfortably to our cable. With the sun now setting behind Captain's Hill, not much chance remained of any more boats coming into the harbor that evening; so we picked up the next stick to our own, secured the line around our bow cleat, and hailed the last whaler in the basin for a ride ashore. Now at last our season was open.

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